DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 785 SP 039 334

TITLE	City of Minneapolis Park & Recreation Summer Youth Report, 1999.
INSTITUTION	Minnesota State Dept. of Economic Security, St. Paul.
PUB DATE	2000-01-00
NOTE	7p.; Cover page may not reproduce adequately.
AVAILABLE FROM	Minneapolis Department of Economic Security, Office of Youth Development, 390 North Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101; Tel: 651-296-6064.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Basic Skills; *Community Programs; *Job Skills; *Job Training; *Summer Programs; Youth Employment; Youth Opportunities; *Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Minnesota (Minneapolis)

ABSTRACT

This report describes youth employment and training programs run by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) in summer 1999. The MPRB operates the Teen Teamworks program, which helps teens acquire appreciation for connections between academic, social, judgment, and job skills. MPRB has identified changing social and economic needs as a primary reason for an expanded summer employment and training program. Teen Teamworks/Earn While You Learn allows Minnesota youth to earn money and learn appropriate work maturity skills through a combination of work experience and academic enrichment. Youth participate in daily work crews, weekly classroom sessions, and voluntary biweekly recreation. Most youth work on crews performing ground maintenance in city parks. Some youth are placed at a service center. Youth assigned to work with building and center directors learn such work as scheduling the use of park equipment, answering phones, and planning group activities. Academic enrichment involves basic skills development in reading, writing, and mathematics; exploration of personal and social issues facing today's youth; and integration of classroom topics into work experiences. Data are provided on: the profiles of youth served; program outcomes; program costs and funding sources; public and private funding sources; and comments from participants. (SM)

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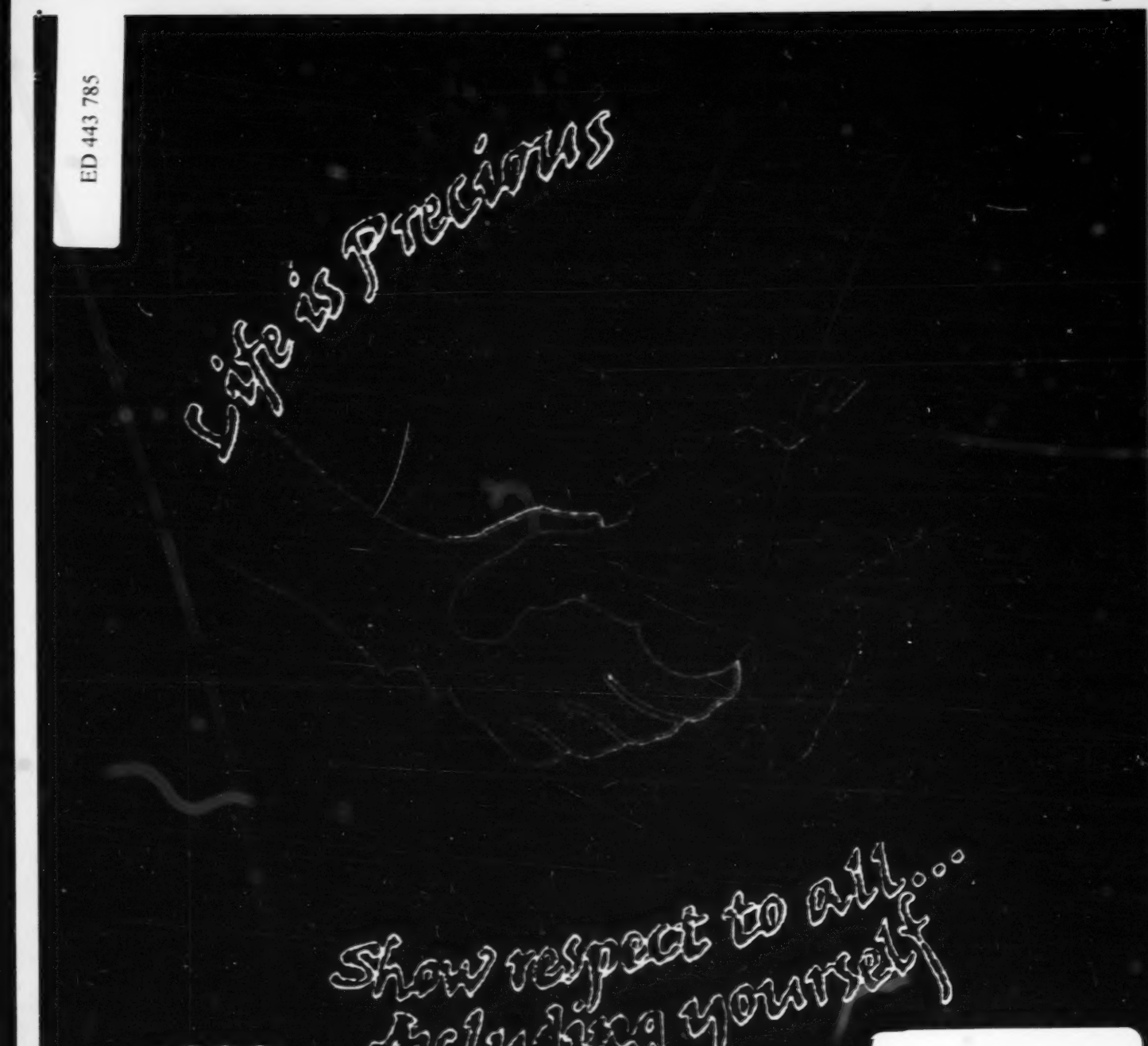

1999 City of Minneapolis Park & Recreation Summer Youth Report

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Introduction

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) received funding through the Minnesota Youth Program (MYP) to operate youth employment and training programs during the summer of 1999. This report includes an overview of the program, results achieved, a profile of youth served and program costs.

Program Overview and Background

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board was founded in 1883 and is responsible for maintaining and developing the Minneapolis park system and providing recreational programs for the city's residents. This semi-autonomous body manages approximately 6,000 acres and facilities that include indoor ice arenas, tennis centers, outdoor pools and a water park and slide. Forty-five recreation centers are staffed year-round.

Over 1 million residents of all ages and from all walks of life take advantage of more than 6,000 MPRB programs annually. These programs serve preschoolers to senior citizens, and special programs serve those with mental or physical disabilities. Various classes, crafts, games, cultural events, environmental programs and sports are available.

The Board believes it is of paramount importance to help young, unskilled youth make the connections between school and work. Providing opportunities for these youth helps them become productive and achieving members of the community.

MPRB operates Teen Teamworks, a summer employment program that has served more than 3,500 youth since its inception in 1986. Through park maintenance and recreation assistance jobs this program offers work experience and educational opportunities to unemployed and underemployed at-risk youth between the ages of 14 and 18. The primary reason for unemployment is not necessarily a shortage of available jobs, but a lack of basic skills and unrealistic expectations of what is required to succeed in the work world. Without appropriate intervention, these deficiencies may translate to chronic unemployment or underemployment in adulthood.

Helping teens acquire an appreciation for the connection between academic, social, judgment and job skills has been the ongoing focus of the Teen Teamworks project.

Community Needs

The MPRB has identified changing social and economic needs as a primary reason for an expanded summer employment and training program. Recent trends in Minnesota have had a significant impact on families with children. These social and economic changes have created a higher demand for a more diverse community-based program that responds to the unmet needs of neighborhood families. Minneapolis children who live in highly stressed, disorganized family environments face multiple risk factors which can combine to place youth in jeopardy of a lifetime of restricted opportunities. Many Minneapolis youth are rapidly heading for adulthood poorly prepared both academically and emotionally. Projections indicate that many of these youth will be unable to hold jobs due to a lack of fundamental literacy skills and work habits.

Minneapolis is becoming more culturally and economically diverse. Each unique neighborhood reflects both the positive and negative changes experienced by other major metropolitan areas over the past decade. The increase in poverty, alcohol and other chemical abuse, teen pregnancy, gang activity, serious juvenile crime, and school dropout rates underscores the need for youth employment and training programs.

Program Activities and Services

"Teen Teamworks/Earn While You Learn" offers Minneapolis youth the opportunity to earn money and learn appropriate work maturity skills through a combination of work experience and academic enrichment. There are essentially three components to the program: daily participation on a work crew, weekly classroom sessions, and voluntary recreational opportunities on a biweekly basis.

Employment and Recreational Opportunities

The majority of youth work on crews performing basic ground maintenance in the city's parks. Youth on these crews spend most of their hours removing trash, raking sand lots, pulling weeds, spreading wood chips, edging paths, and performing other routine or special maintenance tasks.

Crews of eight to ten youth and one supervisor are assigned to perform daily and special maintenance chores at each park. Youth work nine seven-hour days in a two-week pay period, with the tenth day (payday) designated as a voluntary recreation day.

In implementing the 1999 project, the MPRB promoted six youth to Junior Assistants. These youth had worked in Teen Teamworks previously and had been recognized as Outstanding Youth Workers in their crews. The Junior Assistant participated in the supervisor training process and provided great insights into the needs of youth in the program. They were leaders in the field, helping with difficult projects and working with crew members who needed extra support. This position provided a great learning experience for the youth and became a position that other youth strived to achieve.

Each year, Teen Teamwork youth participate in several special projects that go beyond general park maintenance work. For one project, Teen Teamworkers designed and painted a mural that included a poem they had composed for the Pillsbury Neighborhood Association at Fremont and 37th Street North.

The Individual Placement component of the Teen Teamwork program was such a success this year that we were able to place 26 youth one on one with a full time MPRB staff member. These volunteer mentors came from all divisions of the MPRB. The work tasks youth completed proved to be very rewarding experiences for the teens. These special assignments included:

Southside Service Center

Youth placed here were exposed to an assortment of job assignments. A youthworker assigned to Shipping and Receiving was able to learn all aspects of his job, from taking and filling orders and stocking shelves to keeping track of inventory on paper and on the computer.

Maintenance Division

Working in the field under the direct supervision of park keepers and crew leaders provided another positive job skill building opportunity for teens. Youthworkers worked at different Park Centers or on

routes helping to provide basic cleaning and ground maintenance. Teaching youth how to operate power equipment safely and ensure parks were secure for park users was a high priority. Other experiences included setting up, marking and maintaining football, soccer, softball and baseball fields. Youth also received training in the appropriate procedures for the cleaning and water treatment of wading pools.

Recreation Division

Youth assigned to work with building and center directors gained a variety of job experiences. Youthworkers were responsible for monitoring the safety of small children using the wading pools, tot lots and other park facilities. Teens helped schedule the use of park equipment and rooms, answered phones and established a positive relationship with park users and other staff. They also planned and organized their own group activities such as craft projects or sport events. Teens developed important leadership skills and had the opportunity to become mentors themselves.

Administrative Division

Two youth assigned to the downtown offices were a valuable asset to personnel in all divisions. These youth learned to run the switchboard, work on the computer, file and type. They also gained communication and organizational skills, as well as a great sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Academic Enrichment

In addition to these work experiences, all youth also participated in the academic enrichment component of the Teen Teamwork project. This component focuses on three areas:
Basic skills development in reading, writing and math;
Exploration of personal and social issues facing today's youth (for example, teen parenting, family violence, and substance abuse); and
Integration of classroom topics with work experience on the various crews (for example, teamwork, job seeking and keeping skills, and filling out job applications).

These sessions introduced relevant topics to the participants and encouraged them to practice their reading, writing, math and critical thinking skills. Supervisors and youthworkers felt the educational sessions were beneficial because they got some helpful tips on how to communicate better with people and how to get and hold jobs more successfully. The educational sessions also gave youth an opportunity to express themselves and helped them learn and practice job and social skills such as listening, communicating, contributing to group activities and understanding and meeting expectations.

Basic skills remediation in reading and math formed the core subject areas in the classroom. Other aspects of the curriculum included weekly exploration of special topics of interest to the youth. Topics were selected on the basis of comments from participants in previous years, as well as formal and informal assessment of Minneapolis students and teachers during the school year.

Using a variety of interactive teaching techniques, including panel discussions and field trips, educational staff helped the youth learn about appropriate work attitudes and behavior, sexual harassment, educational options, career exploration, decision making and conflict resolution skills, teen parenting, and violence and family issues. One highlight of the 1999 program occurred during group discussions on "My Decisions, My Future." The teens' openness and honesty with each other and with themselves elicited some profound discussions. The participants offered support to one another and

worked together to find answers to problems they were experiencing in their lives.

Youth who successfully completed the Earn While You Learn program also earned elective credit towards their high school diploma. Many youth saw this as a key benefit of the program.

Profile of Youth Served

Teen Teamworks '99 youthworkers ranged from age 14 to 18; however, 77% were 14 and 15 years old. The majority (66%) of all youth workers were male. Research has consistently demonstrated that there is a higher correlation of "at risk" youth among adolescent males, especially young males of color.

An overview of 1999 youthworker statistics:

Youth hired:	165
Male:	106 (64%)
Female:	59 (36%)
14-15 yrs old:	127 (77%)
16-17 yrs old:	38 (23%)
Black:	124 (75%)
White:	20 (12%)
American Indian:	7 (4%)
Hispanic:	3 (2%)
Asian:	12 (7%)

Outcomes

All staff, work site supervisors and educational staff in the Teen Teamworks demonstrated an ethic of service to the youth. There was a real sense of caring and commitment. Supervisors and educators realize that, for many of the youth, they may well be the only positive adult role model. They routinely went "above and beyond" their job responsibilities in their efforts to help these youth.

The program has also made real strides at building a sense of community in each of the city's neighborhoods. Youth performed a much-needed community service in their "home" parks, which is appreciated by neighborhood residents. At the same time, they also learned to value and respect the city's natural resources and to work with peers from their neighborhoods to achieve common goals.

Program Costs/Funding Sources

The program cost per participant (including educational curriculum development and leadership) was $2,848 ($470,000 for 165 participants).

Public Funding Sources:

Minnesota Department of Economic Security:	$235,000
Minneapolis City Council/CDBG Funds:	$70,000
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board:	$145,000

Private Funding Sources:

Dayton - Hudson Foundation	$20,000

Total Funding From Public and Private Sources: $470,000

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Comments from Youth Participants

"The thing I like about work is when we do a lot of work and get recognized for it."

"I think this was a good program because it [gave me] a chance to see what it was like [to have] a job at a young age."

"People say good things about our work on the parks."

"I have really enjoyed this program this year. I like the feeling of helping out the community."

"After being in this Teen Teamworks for the Park Board, I feel good because I helped clean our environment and also learned about teamwork."